



Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

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July 1, 2021

Mr. Daniel Morley
Assistant Division Director
Connecticut Office of Policy and Management
450 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: FY 2022 RiverCOG Regional Services Grant (RSG) Spending Plan

Dear Mr. Morley:

The Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG) is very appreciative of the state of Connecticut's continued support. The FY 2022 Regional Services Grant (RSG) of \$304,966 will support RiverCOG's staff throughout the fiscal year as they work in the areas of fostering shared municipal services; statutorily required tasks; COVID-19 recovery; and regional, environmental, and agriculture planning. The vast majority (93%) of the grant will be used for staff salaries and associated audited indirect rate.

RiverCOG will complete two important RSG funded plans this year. We expect RiverCOG to adopt its first Regional Plan of Conservation and Development in September 2021. The regional plan will provide a framework for our seventeen municipalities to work together in their land use decisions to address regional issues and take advantage of opportunities in a coordinated way. The public comment period for the Regional Plan closed yesterday and public participation via virtual means was successful. The other major FY 2022 project is the Regional Housing Plan and municipal affordable housing plan annexes. The Regional Housing Plan will both meet the statutory mandate of CGS section 8-30j for the majority of our members, but will also look at housing on a regional basis and facilitate the recommendation of new approaches to address our housing issues and needs. The consultant costs for both of these projects will be paid from a FY 2021 RSG (RSG-021-03) carryover, but staff time on these two projects will come from FY 2022 RSG.

As in past years, RiverCOG will use RSG to fund RiverCOG staff participation in allied statewide initiatives such as COVID-19 Long Term Recovery, tax assessment regionalization, ACIR, CTCOG, and Regional Election Monitoring. I will continue to serve as chair of the CTCOG and RiverCOG staff will continue to support me in that role. This will include the legal support of RiverCOG attorney Steve Mednick to the administration, if needed for future executive orders.

I expect that additional work on regional services in FY 2022 will come from a portion of the county ARPA funding that municipalities will be receiving. It is our hope to use ARPA to fund the digitization of municipal building departments and their paper workflows. Digitization will reduce in-person traffic in

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town halls, reducing the potential spread of COVID-19 and other disease. Also, if done right, it will create a digital foundation for a shared building department facilitated by shared technology and processes. The perennial shortage of building officials necessitates a shared model and we hope to use ARPA funding to help move this concept along. Other work on ARPA administration and shared approaches to COVID-19 recovery may also be pursued by RiverCOG, funded by municipal contributions of their ARPA funds.

Finally, I would like to thank OPM for working with CTCOG on the formula and statewide level of funding for RSG. This is an important vote of confidence in COGs and an investment in organizational capacity on the regional level to address the challenges facing our municipal and state governments. We are looking forward to the next year and to continued partnership with OPM and the State of Connecticut.

Sincerely,



Samuel S. Gold, AICP
Executive Director

The major tasks and projects that RiverCOG will fund with FY22 RSG include:

1. Completion of the Lower Connecticut River Valley Regional Plan of Conservation and Development
2. Regional Planning and Other Statutory Mandates on COGs such as land use referrals
3. COVID-19 Long-Term Recovery
4. Regional Shared Services and Shared Services Planning
5. Supporting regional land and environmental conservation efforts through the Lower Connecticut River Land Trust, partnership with regional land trusts, CT DEEP, and UConn
6. Support for the Regional Agricultural Council and agricultural planning
7. Social / Human Services Planning
 - a. Support and hosting of the Shoreline Basic Needs Taskforce
8. Completion of the Regional Housing Plan including thirteen CGS section 8-30j compliant municipal affordable housing plan annexes
9. Economic Development Planning
10. Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
 - a. Support OPM in fulfilling the new statutory mandate for statewide GIS
 - b. Update regional GIS data and software
 - c. Provide data driven support to member towns that have varied in-house GIS and technical capabilities
 - d. Support State efforts to develop state base layers and to standardize data
11. Regional Election Monitoring
 - a. Supporting the Secretary of the State on election initiatives
 - b. Contracting with a Regional Elections Monitor
12. Supporting allied organizations and initiatives CTCOG, COVID-19 Long-Term Recovery Steering Committees, ACIR, SustainableCT, AdvanceCT, CT Tourism Coalition, and CT RC&D

RiverCOG FY2022 RSG Spending Plan Estimated Budget

Project	Cost of Staff Hours	Contracts and Legal Fees	Total Project Budget
1. Completion of the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development	\$22,872.45		\$22,872.45
2. Regional Planning and Other Statutory Mandates on RiverCOG	\$40,319.39		\$40,319.39
3. COVID-19 Long Term Recovery	\$12,198.64	\$2,000.00	\$14,198.64
4. Regional Shared Services Support and Development	\$13,723.47		\$13,723.47
5. Lower CT River Land Trust and Regional Land Trust Shared Services	\$49,808.78		\$49,808.78
6. Regional Agricultural Council/Ag Planning	\$18,297.96		\$18,297.96
7. Social / Human Services Coordination and Planning Support	\$3,049.66		\$3,049.66
8. Regional Housing Planning	\$51,094.56		\$51,094.56
9. Economic Development Planning	\$1,524.83		\$1,524.83
10. Regional Geographic Information Systems	\$30,127.76		\$30,127.76
11. Regional Election Monitoring	\$197.28	\$8,000.00	\$8,197.28
12. Support for Allied Partners	\$19,822.79		\$19,822.79
13. Administration	\$14,723.44		\$14,723.44
14. Miscellaneous Direct Costs (printing, travel, subscriptions, software, etc.)		\$17,205.00	\$17,205.00
Total	\$277,761.00	\$27,205.00	\$304,966.00

- Hours and cost figures are estimated based on what is expected to be completed by the completion of the fiscal year and the RiverCOG staff expected to be involved in each project
- Hourly costs include an estimated indirect rate of 125%
- Hours and funds may be moved between projects and work areas, as required, including the addition of new projects or responsibilities within a category

Project Descriptions

1. *Completion of the Regional Plan of Conservation & Development*

The creation of RiverCOG's first Regional Plan of Conservation and Development is wrapping up with the assistance of new staff and our consultant Fitzgerald and Halliday. We retooled this project for COVID-19 by transiting to all online meetings. In July, August, and September of 2020, RiverCOG held public meetings for each of its 17-member municipalities to discuss the Regional Plan with land use commissioners, town officials, and members of the public. At these meetings, we learned from our municipalities what they identified the region's issues and challenges, opportunities, and vision. The input from the municipal meetings formed the basis for four regional thematic meetings which were held virtually in December 2020 and January 2021. These regional thematic meetings covered regional demographic trends, regional visioning, and two virtual mapping exercises. The public comment period for the draft Regional Plan was launched with a presentation to the public on April 26, 2021 and closed on June 30. This summer the Regional Planning Committee (RPC) will complete a final round of edits based on the comments received on the draft plan. It is expected that the RPC will vote to recommend the draft Regional Plan to the COG for adoption at an August meeting. The COG should adopt the final Regional Plan in the fall of this year.

2. *Ongoing Statutory Mandates on COGs*

RiverCOG will continue staffing the land use referral process with supporting our Regional Planning Committee who has been delegated responsibilities for land use referrals, the regional plan, and planning oversight. The RPC holds monthly meetings. Some regional planning activities overlap with activities in the RiverCOG Unified Planning Work Program. Transportation planning funds, as well as local match from agency dues, may be spent alongside RSG on regional planning tasks.

3. *COVID-19 Long Term Recovery*

RiverCOG will continue to partner with the state on staffing and leading long-term recovery from COVID-19 in DEMHS Region 2. RiverCOG shares this responsibility with South Central Regional COG. If we receive a grant from the federal Economic Development Administration, this work would be covered by that grant. The primary focus of this work will be economic recovery and assisting municipalities with their APRA grants and projects. The goal will be to build back better than what existed in our municipalities and region before the pandemic. As necessary, RiverCOG attorney Steve Mednick will be available to the administration if future executive orders are needed.

4. *Regional Shared Services*

The Lower Connecticut River Valley is one of the most regionalized regions in the state. The seventeen municipalities in the LCRV share staff, participate in regional shared services, group purchasing, equipment sharing, shared engineer, regional school and health districts. Nevertheless, more can be done. RiverCOG staff will continue to convene and support the Regional Shared Services Committee. The focus for FY2022 will be developing regional services and regional projects to be funded by a portion of the county ARPA funds that the municipalities will be receiving. The most exciting project is the digitization of building departments, which will reduce the number of people having to go into town halls, thereby reducing potential for disease transmission, but will also build the foundation for shared approaches to employing building officials and conducting building department work. It is envisioned that a shared technology and workflow will be adopted by the initial participating towns that will be expandable to all member municipalities. Ultimately the goal is

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to address the perennial shortage of building officials and by supporting a regional office that is large enough to employ both junior and senior staff, and be capable of internal succession planning. Other regional services could include regional shared administration of ARPA grants and ongoing regional efforts to address the crisis of dead and dying trees killed by invasive insects and other invasive species such as hydrilla in the Connecticut River.

RSG funds spent on regional services planning are matched with other agency dues and municipal in-kind support. RiverCOG will continue work on merging the region's two small transit districts and facilitating the implementation of the Lower Connecticut River Valley Regional Transit Study. Also, RiverCOG will continue to operate the regional household hazardous waste program and permanent facility.

5. Land Trust Exchange, Lower Connecticut River Land Trust, and Environmental Planning

RiverCOG staff will continue to support the Lower Connecticut River Valley Land Trust and the regional Land Trust Exchange, in its work to find regional, sustainable approaches to land conservation, stewardship, training, and fundraising with the land trusts in the Lower Connecticut River Valley Region. RiverCOG staff will also continue working with the Connecticut Land Conservation Council. Work to support municipal compliance with MS4 stormwater permits, combating and controlling invasive species, and other environmental planning and initiatives fall under this task. All of the region's municipal Natural Hazard Mitigation Plans should be updated and adopted early in the fiscal year. This include an updated stormwater flooding model for the region.

6. Agricultural Planning and Regional Agricultural Council

RiverCOG staff will continue supporting and hosting the Regional Agricultural Council, the first and only such regional agricultural entity in the state. Tasks will include work to support farm viability, working with towns on agricultural valuation of land, keeping the knowyourfarmers.org website up-to-date, and other promotional materials supporting regional agriculture. Matching funds include allied RSG tasks in environmental planning, in-kind contributions of time from local farmers, and potentially grant funds from the CT Department of Agriculture or USDA.

7. Basic Needs Taskforce / Regional Social and Human Services

RiverCOG will continue to host the Shoreline Basic Needs Council and support regional human and social service efforts and workforce development. This work will be in addition to RiverCOG support of regional COVID-19 response and recovery efforts to assess and address unmet needs. RSG will be matched with EDA grant funds, transportation planning funds, in-kind volunteer support, and local dues.

8. Housing Planning

In January 2021, RiverCOG published a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the creation of the Lower Connecticut River Valley Regional Housing Plan which would fulfill the Connecticut General Statute Section 8-30j requirements for Affordable Housing Plans for 13 of its municipalities and also build upon the requirements of 8-30j to conduct a larger assessment of housing needs in our region and make recommendations for new and comprehensive approaches to meet current and future housing needs. The participating municipalities are Chester, Clinton, Cromwell, Deep River, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Killingworth, Lyme, Middletown, Old Lyme, and Portland. The town of Essex completed a section 8-30j compliant plan in 2018 which will be included in this project for updating. Consultants SLR and Goman + York will assist RiverCOG staff in creating 8-30j compliant Affordable Housing Plans for the 13 participating municipalities as well as the

larger Regional Housing Plan. The project officially kicked off in May 2021 and should be completed by June 2022.

9. *Economic Development Planning*

RiverCOG will continue to partner with the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce and municipal economic development commissions in economic development planning work for the region. This could be expanded if a grant from the EDA is received to include the creation of the region's first Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. RiverCOG will also partner with the Middlesex County Revitalization Commission on a regional grant program for small businesses funded by potential municipal ARPA funds. RiverCOG will continue to partner with DECD, municipal economic development commissions, and AdvanceCT in their statewide work. .

10. *Geographic Information Systems*

RiverCOG will continue to maintain regional GIS data and conduct GIS based analyses based. RiverCOG will use the new inland flooding model in its GIS work. Other GIS tasks will include working with OPM on statewide and regional models for GIS services, focusing on the creation of common, seamless statewide datasets, in support of the new statutory mandates. Local dues will also fund some GIS staff mapping tasks. Transportation planning funds will also be used to support some GIS activities.

11. *Regional Election Monitor*

RiverCOG will fund the Regional Election Monitor (REM) position and program with RSG in FY2022. This program was previously funded by the Secretary of the State, but earmarked funding has not been provided in this fiscal year for this regional service. The REM has been invaluable to our towns as election officials age and retire and new technologies and reporting systems are implemented in the state. The REM will be responsible for municipal election official trainings, primary and election preparations, and assistance with post-election recounts and audits. RiverCOG will also partner with the Secretary of the State's office on future elections initiatives such as identification of new elections technologies.

12. *Participation with CTCOG, AICR, CT RC&D, SustainableCT, DPH Water Planning / Water Utility Coordination, Connecticut Tourism Coalition, OPM Ad-Hoc Property Assessment Committee, and others.*

RiverCOG staff will participate and support various allied organizations on relevant regional services and regional planning initiatives. RSG funded staff time is matched with in-kind support provided by the various allied and partner organizations. This includes the ongoing collaboration with OPM on regional property revaluation and modernization of tax assessment. RiverCOG will participate in and support similar new efforts.

13. *Administration*

RiverCOG staff will administer the RSG grant and reporting. Also, under the administration task RiverCOG will work with OPM and legislators on RSG related issues including FY2023 funding levels, requirements, and formulas. RiverCOG will also use RSG in the preparation of FY2022 Regional Performance Incentive Program grant applications, if any. Most administrative tasks will be shared with portions of other agency grants.

14. *Direct Expenses*

In addition to the Regional Election Monitor and legal fees to support COVID-19 executive orders, RSG will fund other direct expenses such as printing, software licenses, travel and mileage, staff training, website

updates for various RSG funded projects, and other technical support. Direct expenses may be shared with other agency grants and local dues.

15. *Other*

RSG may also be used for new projects or responsibilities that may arise over the course of the fiscal year.